

## **Protomartyr and Equal of the Apostles Thekla** **Commemorated on September 24**

The Holy Protomartyr and Equal of the Apostles Thekla was born in the city of Iconium. She was the daughter of rich and illustrious parents, and she was distinguished by extraordinary beauty. At eighteen years of age they betrothed her to an eminent youth. But after she heard the preaching of the holy Apostle Paul about the Savior, St Thekla with all her heart came to love the Lord Jesus Christ, and she steadfastly resolved not to enter into marriage, but rather to devote all her life to preaching the Gospel.

St Thekla's mother was opposed to her daughter's plans and insisted that she marry her betrothed. St Thekla's fiancé also complained to the prefect of the city about the Apostle Paul, accusing him of turning his bride against him. The prefect locked up St Paul in prison.

During the night St Thekla secretly ran away from her house, and she bribed the prison guards, giving them all her gold ornaments, and so made her way into the prison to the prisoner. For three days she sat at the feet of the Apostle Paul, listening to his fatherly precepts. Thekla's disappearance was discovered, and servants were sent out everywhere looking for her. Finally, they found her in the prison and brought her home by force.

At his trial St Paul was sentenced to banishment from the city. Again they urged St Thekla to consent to the marriage, but she would not change her mind. Neither the tears of her mother, nor her wrath, nor the threats of the prefect could separate St Thekla from her love for the Heavenly Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Her mother in a insane rage demanded from the judges a death sentence against her unyielding daughter, and St Thekla was sentenced to be burned. Without flinching, the holy martyr went into the fire and made the Sign of the Cross over herself. At this moment the Savior appeared to her, blessing her present deed, and inexpressible joy filled her holy soul.

The flames of the fire shot up high, but the martyr was surrounded by a light and the flames did not touch her. Thunder boomed, and a strong downpour of rain and hail extinguished the fire. The torturers scattered in fear. St Thekla, kept safe by the Lord, left the city and with the help of a certain Christian youth, searched for the Apostle Paul. The holy apostle and his companions, among whom was St Barnabas, were hidden in a cave not far from the city, praying fervently, that the Lord would strengthen St Thekla in her sufferings.

After this, St Thekla went with them preaching the Gospel in Antioch. In this city she was pursued by a certain dignitary named Alexander, who was captivated by her beauty. St Thekla refused his offer of marriage, and so she was condemned to death for being a Christian. Twice they set loose hungry wild animals upon her, but they would not touch the holy virgin. Instead, they lay down meekly and licked her feet.

The Providence of God preserved the holy martyr unharmed through all her torments. Finally, they tied her to two oxen and began to chase her with red-hot rods, but the strong cords broke asunder like cobwebs, and the oxen ran off, leaving St Thekla unharmed. The people began shouting, "Great is the God of the Christians!" The prefect himself became terrified, realizing that the holy martyr was being kept safe by the Almighty God, Whom she served. He then gave orders to set free the servant of God Thekla.

With the blessing of the Apostle Paul, St Thekla then settled in a desolate region of Isaurian Seleucia and dwelt there for many years, constantly preaching the Word of God and healing the sick through her prayer. St Thekla converted many pagans to Christ, and the Church appropriately names her as "Equal- to-the-Apostles." Even a pagan priest, trying to assault her purity and punished for his impudence, was brought by her to holy Baptism. More than once the Enemy of the race of man tried to destroy St Thekla through people blinded by sin, but the power of God always preserved this faithful servant of Christ.

When St Thekla was already a ninety-year-old woman, pagan sorcerers became incensed at her for treating the sick for free. They were unable to comprehend that the saint was healing the sick by the power of the grace of Christ, and they presumed that the virgin-goddess Artemis was her special

helper. Envious of St Thekla, they sent their followers to defile her. When they came near her, St Thekla cried out for help to Christ the Savior, and a rock split open and hid the holy virgin, the bride of Christ. Thus did St Thekla offer up her holy soul to the Lord.

The holy Church glorifies the Protomartyr Thekla as "the glory of women and guide for the suffering, opening up the way through every torment." From of old many churches were dedicated to her, one of which was built at Constantinople by the holy Equal of the Apostles Constantine (May 21). The Protomartyr Thekla, a prayerful intercessor for ascetics, is also invoked during the tonsure of women into monasticism.

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